DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 469 350 CG 031 387

AUTHOR	Howieson, Cathy; Semple, Sheila
TITLE	Pupils' Experience of the Careers Service. CES Briefing.
INSTITUTION	Edinburgh Univ. (Scotland). Centre for Educational Sociology.
REPORT NO	CES-23
PUB DATE	2001-10-00
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Centre for Educational Sociology, Department of Education and Society, University of Edinburgh, St. John's Land, Holyrood Road, Edinburgh EH8 8AQ Scotland. Tel: 44 0131-651-6238; Fax: 44 0131-651-6239; e-mail: ces@ed.ac.uk; Web site: http://www.ed.ac.uk/~ces. For full text: http://www.ed.ac.uk/~ces/publications.htm.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Career Development; *Career Guidance; Foreign Countries; Intermediate Grades; Program Effectiveness; *Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS	*Scotland

ABSTRACT

Careers guidance is recognized as increasingly important as young people experience longer and more complicated post-school transitions into and through education, training, and the labor market. They may need to change career several times over their lifetime and to undertake continuing education and training. The Careers Service is the main provider of careers guidance to young people. This "Briefing" reports the experiences and views of some of the Careers Service's young clients--4th and 5th year pupils--who were surveyed as part of a wider research project on the Effectiveness of Careers Services.(Author)

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Pupils' Experience of the Careers Service

CES Briefing

No. 23, October 2001

By

Cathy Howieson
Sheila Semple

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CES Briefing

Pupils' Experience of the Careers Service

by Cathy Howieson and Sheila Semple

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Careers guidance is recognised as increasingly important as young people experience longer and more complicated post-school transitions into and through education, training and the labour market. They may need to change career several times over their lifetime and to undertake continuing education and training. The Careers Service is the main provider of careers guidance to young people. This *Briefing* reports the experiences and views of some of the Careers Service's young clients – 4th and 5th year pupils – who were surveyed as part of a wider research project on the Effectiveness of Careers Services.

- **An** individual interview with a Careers Adviser was the most common input that pupils received from the Careers Service.
- **The** likelihood of pupils having a interview varied depending on the Careers Service Company (CSC) concerned but this variation was not explained by differences in CSCs' official interview policies.
- A majority of pupils who had an interview thought it had been at the right time for them. Nevertheless, there was also a demand for interviews at an earlier stage.
- A substantial proportion of pupils who had not had a careers interview had either requested one but had not been interviewed or had not understood the interview system well enough to make a request.
- **Most** pupils rated their careers interview as useful; the timing of their interview was the most critical factor in determining their opinion about this.
- **Careers** Advisers were judged by pupils to be more effective in respect of some aspects of the careers interview than others. Pupils' opinions also varied depending on the CSC concerned.
- **Discussion** of post-school plans with their parents and individually with teachers increased the likelihood that pupils would have a careers interview and that they would have a positive opinion of it.

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Introduction

From the early 1970s until the mid 1990s, each local authority was responsible for its own Careers Service. The management of the Careers Service was changed in 1995 when Careers Services moved out of local authority control. Since 1995 there have been 17 Careers Service Companies in Scotland, the majority operating as companies limited by guarantee with charitable status.

This position will change in April 2002 with the creation of a national Careers Service 'Careers Scotland'. Careers Scotland has a wide remit that covers the provision of all-age careers guidance and which encompasses a variety of functions previously carried out by other organisations than the Careers Service. As Careers Scotland considers how to meet its new areas of responsibility, it also needs to reflect on how its service to one of its long-standing core client groups – young people in school – might be developed and enhanced. This *Briefing* focuses on 4th and 5th year pupils' experiences and opinion of the Careers Service and the implications for Careers Scotland.

The data

The data reported in this *Briefing* come from the survey of a 50% sample of 4th, 5th and 6th year pupils in 10 case study schools in five Careers Service Companies (CSCs). The overall response rate was 52% but responses from 6th year pupils were particularly low in some schools and their results are not reported.

Client contact systems

CSCs in Scotland do not take a uniform approach to contact with pupils in schools. In the first stage of the research with all 17 CSCs in Scotland, we found that CSCs generally talked in terms of three types of contact systems: 'blanket', 'selective' and 'self-referral/open access'. We found, however, that definitions of these systems varied across and within CSCs and that there were also discrepancies between stated policies on contact systems and what happened in practice.

Pupils' contact with the Careers Service

Contact before 4th year

The main Careers Service (CS) client group in school has generally been pupils in 4th year and above but Careers Services have often had inputs before then, especially in second year. The research found that just over half of 4th years had come into contact with the Careers Service in earlier years, most commonly though a class or group session. The chances that a young person would have encountered the Careers Service before 4th year not only varied across Careers Service Companies but also between schools in the same CSC. This suggests that early contact with the Careers Service is not only a matter of CSC policy about work before S4 but also depends on the wishes and circumstances of individual schools.

Contact in 4th and 5th years

The large majority of 4th and 5th year pupils had some sort of contact with the Careers Service at some point in their school career. Whether or not they did so varied across CSCs and in some cases, within schools in the same CSC. By far the main way that pupils encountered the CS was by having an interview on an individual basis with a Careers Adviser. For 4th years, having an introductory talk was also a common experience.

Having an interview with the Careers Adviser

Overall, around three-fifths of S4 and S5 had an interview(s) with a Careers Adviser but pupils in certain CSCs were more likely to have an interview compared with pupils in other CSCs. This variation is not explained by differences in the CSCs' policies on interviewing, for example, whether the CSC had a policy that pupils should themselves request an interview (a self-referral system) or a policy where the Careers Adviser assesses who should be interviewed (a selective system). In addition to the CSC that pupils were in and the school they attended, a number of other factors each had an effect on their chances of having an interview.

Factors which increased pupils' chances of an interview included being a high attainer and if pupils had discussed their plans on their own with guidance and/or other teachers. 4th year pupils who were serious truants were less likely to have been interviewed (and were less likely to have had any contact with the Careers Service). Having no ideas about their post-school plans decreased the chances that pupils would have an interview compared with those who had some ideas or a definite plan. The fact that pupils who had not developed any post-school plans did not have an interview suggests a lack of understanding by pupils of the purposes of a careers interview.

The timing of interviews

A majority of 4th and 5th year pupils who had an interview with a Careers Adviser thought it had been at the right time for them (S4: 60%; S5: 75%). There was no difference across the CSCs in this respect although this might have been expected since the Companies varied in their interview policy and practices. Pupils in a CSC with a policy of self-referral (where they ask for an interview at a time when they perceive a need) were no more likely to think that their interview had been at the right time than those in Companies with a selective or blanket policy.

Despite the high levels of satisfaction with the timing of interviews, there was still a demand for earlier timing of interviews in 4th and 5th year and for interviews before 4th year. Around a third of 4th year pupils who had an interview responded that they had known what to expect from it.

Reasons for not having an interview

Some pupils responded that they had not wanted an interview but over half of 4th year pupils who had not been

interviewed gave negative reasons for this: either they had requested one but not been interviewed, or they had not understood enough about the interview system to make a request. This was also the case for around two fifths of 5th year pupils. In two CSCs, the problem seemed to be more that pupils had not had an interview after requesting one but in the other three CSCs, the issue was more one of pupils not understanding the interview system.

Pupils' opinion of their careers interview

A majority of pupils rated their interview as useful; 5th years were slightly less positive than 4th years (Table 1). Among 4th years there was some variation in opinion depending on the CSC. The most critical factor in whether pupils rated their careers interview as useful was whether it had happened at the right time for them. A number of other factors also had a positive effect, for example, if they had discussed their plans with their parents; discussed them with teachers on an individual basis; if they had a positive opinion of their careers education classes; and if their careers education classes had happened on a regular basis throughout the school year.

Table 1: Was your careers interview useful?

	Very %	Quite a lot %	A little %	Not at all %
4th years	30	37	25	8
5th years	20	40	31	9

Pupils were confident about the impartiality of the Careers Adviser: that s/he gave honest information and advice (Table 2). Most thought that the Careers Adviser had explained their post-school options and a majority felt that the Careers Adviser had helped to think about careers they had not considered before. Overall, therefore, pupils judged their careers interview as effective in providing them with a good overview of their future possibilities. Most felt that the Careers Adviser had let them make up their own mind and around half said that the Careers Adviser had accepted their ideas without question. In interpreting this last finding, it should be remembered that while Careers Advisers should let pupils make their own decisions and not 'put them off' any of their ideas, they do also need to ensure that pupils have reflected properly on them. A substantial minority of pupils did not think the Careers Adviser had helped them to relate their career ideas to their personal characteristics. There were differences across the Careers Service Companies in pupils' views about the Careers Adviser and what had happened in their interview and how their interview had been conducted.

Careers information is an important part of the interview for some pupils. Those planning to go on to further or higher education were more likely to think they had received relevant information than those intending to enter the labour market. Potential labour market entrants were more likely to get information on FE than they were to get information on jobs and training places.

Table 2: Pupils' opinion of their careers guidance interview

% responding 'very much' or 'quite a lot'	S4	S5
Do you think the Careers Adviser...		
... encouraged you to talk about self	53	56
... let you make up own mind	71	67
... gave you honest information and advice	85	83
% responding 'yes'	**S4**	**S5**
Do you think the Careers Adviser...		
... explained options available to you after school	83	79
... made you think about careers you hadn't considered	65	62
... accepted your career ideas without question	45	49
... helped you decide on a plan for the future	47	46
... helped you think about your strengths and weaknesses and career ideas	58	57

Implications

Variation in pupils' contact with the CS. The research found considerable variation in the likelihood of 4th and 5th year pupils having any contact with the Careers Service and also having an interview with a Careers Adviser. The latter was not explained by CSCs' policies on interviewing. The critical question is whether this variation was in response to differences in pupil needs or for other reasons. The level of variation which the research found (for example, in 4th years' chances of an interview), suggests that differences in pupil needs is not the only explanation. The research with CSC staff and teachers suggests that other factors are likely to contribute, for example, how well the school-CS link was operating in different schools; pupils' awareness of the CS and their understanding of how the interviewing system operated; and how effectively individual Careers Advisers and teachers were operating in their respective roles. A task for Careers Scotland is to address this issue of variation in pupils' chances of contact with the Careers Service.

Variation in effectiveness. Careers Advisers were judged by pupils to be more effective in respect of some aspects of the careers interview than others. This points to the need for greater attention to the monitoring of Careers Advisers' careers guidance practice in interviews (and elsewhere) and to appropriate staff development. Pupils' opinion of the interview process and its effectiveness varied across Careers Service Companies which raises a question about pupils' entitlement to a common minimum standard. To what extent are pupils in some areas less well served by the Careers Service (and by their schools) than those in other places? A common standard is something that Careers Scotland is committed to addressing.

The management of interviews. There was a demand for interviews to be conducted earlier in 4th and 5th years and also before 4th year. What scope does the CS have to

ccommodate this demand? To what extent could it be met y using other types of inputs?

The research suggests that strategies to inform pupils bout the purpose of interviews and the mechanics of how ie interview system operates need to be reviewed. ttention also needs to be given to ensuring that pupils are ware of interview priorities and waiting times.

A more varied approach. CS work in schools with 4th ears and especially 5th years was dominated by the ndividual vocational guidance interview. There was a ommon view among Careers Advisers and teachers that ie interview is the 'best' sort of input for a pupil. But iere is evidence to suggest that various combinations of hort and long interviews, group sessions and personal ction points for using careers information and guidance ystems are more effective in moving clients forward in ieir career skills and thinking (Morris *et al*, 1995). Iowever, it is important that the use of different pproaches is based on a proper identification of need ather than a concern to save money.

CSCs have started to move away from an verwhelming focus on the individual interview and the reation of Careers Scotland provides an opportunity for a eview of the traditional pattern of inputs.

Identification of needs. CSCs and schools used a ariety of approaches to identifying pupils' needs but did ot have a comprehensive and systematic approach. CSC taff were themselves critical of the diagnostic uestionnaires in common use. They also recognised that lient evaluations focused on pupils' satisfaction with CSC nputs rather than the direct identification of their careers uidance needs. Considerable work has now been done on nstruments to assess individuals' careers guidance needs nd the right type and level of input (eg Sampson *et al*, 999). Used appropriately, such developments may offer Careers Scotland a practical way forward on the dentification of individual need. But it is essential that uch methods are not used in a mechanistic way: clients' eed and career inputs should not simply be based on their core in an assessment but should involve personal liscussion and negotiation with them.

Discussion with parents and teachers. It appears that liscussing their careers ideas with a teacher (both guidance nd non-guidance teachers) benefited pupils' career levelopment in several respects and points to the value of chools enabling them to have as much opportunity to do o as possible. Discussion with their parents was also a ositive factor and reinforces the importance of the CS upporting parents in their informal careers guidance role.

Further reading

Morris, M., Simkin, C. and Stoney, S. (1995) "The role of the Careers Service in Careers Education and Guidance in Schools", *Report No. QADU/RD7*, DfEE. Sheffield.

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Scottish Executive (2001) **Careers Scotland – The Way Forward**, Edinburgh: Scottish Executive.

Further information

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About this study

The research was commissioned by the Scottish Office in 1997 to map Careers Service provision across Scotland and consider its effectiveness after a period of major change to its organisation and management. The research involved: review of national documentation and statistics and interviews with key informants; collection of documents and statistics and interviews with Heads of Service and Careers Advisers in all 17 CSCs. From this data, a typology of CSCs was created and used to select five CSCs for further in-depth study. In each of the five CSCs a programme of interviews was carried out with a range of CSC personnel; school staff; and representatives of Careers Service Boards, LECs, LAs, and Education Business partnerships. Three surveys were conducted: S4, S5 and S6 pupils in 10 schools were surveyed twice, a year apart; a second survey covered 300 employers; and the third survey was of 60 Training Organisations.

Related CES *Briefings*

No. 5: "Guidance in Secondary Schools: Careers and the World of Work" by C.Howieson and S.Semple

No. 22: "How Would You Know? Assessing the Effectiveness of Careers Guidance Services" by C.Howieson and S.Semple

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